

*MASTER
NEGATIVE
NO. 93-81223-16*

MICROFILMED 1993

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES/NEW YORK

as part of the
"Foundations of Western Civilization Preservation Project"

Funded by the
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Reproductions may not be made without permission from
Columbia University Library

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

The copyright law of the United States - Title 17, United States Code - concerns the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or other reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copy order if, in its judgement, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of the copyright law.

AUTHOR:

CHANDLER, ALBERT R.

TITLE:

PRAGMATISM AS A
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

PLACE:

S.L.

DATE:

1908

Master Negative #

93-81223-16

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
PRESERVATION DEPARTMENT

BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

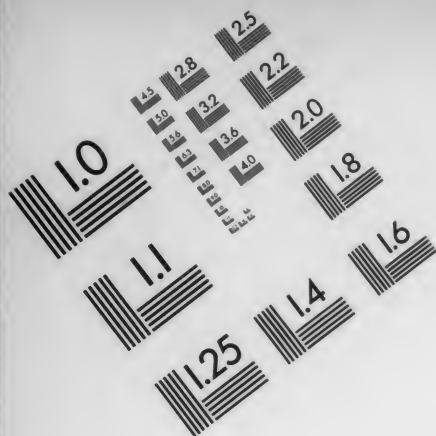
Original Material as Filmed - Existing Bibliographic Record

BKS/SAVE Books FUL/BIB NYCG93-B1381 Acquisitions NYCG-BT
FIN ID NHDG089382001-B - Record 1 of 1 - SAVE record
UNI
ID:NYCG93-B1381 RIYP:a ST:s FRN: MS: EL:u AD:02-17-93
CC:9665 BLT:am DCF: CSC:c MOD: SNR: ATC: UD:02-17-93
CP:xx L:eng INT: GPC:? BIO:? FIC:? CON:
PC:s PD:1908/ REP: CPI:? FSI:? ILC: II:?
MMD: OR: POL: DM: RR: COL: EML: GEN: BSE:
040 NNC#cNNC
100 1 Chandler, Albert Richard.†d1884-
245 10 Pragmatism as a theory of knowledge†h[microform].
260 [n.p.]†c1908.
300 10p.†c22cm.
440 Story prize.†v1908
500 Cover title.
500 At head of title: Dartmouth College. Department of Philosophy.
504 Bibliography: p. 10.
650 0 Pragmatism†xAddresses, essays, lectures.
LDG RLIN
QD 02-17-93

Restrictions on Use:

TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11x
IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB
DATE FILMED: 3/30/93 INITIALS BAP
FILMED BY: RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS, INC WOODBRIDGE, CT

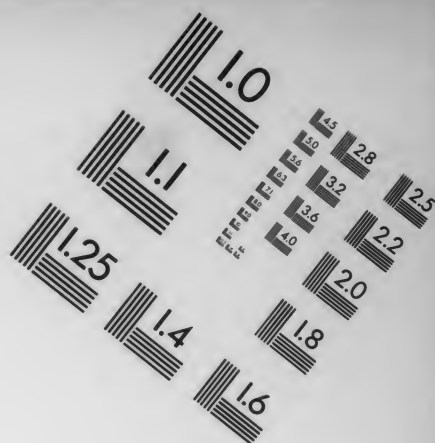


AIM

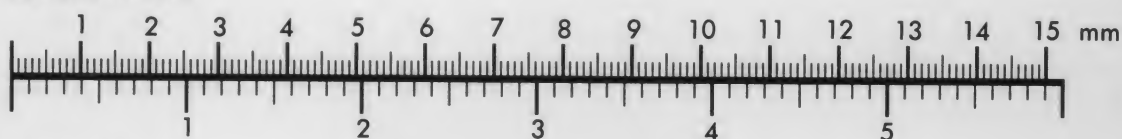
Association for Information and Image Management

1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

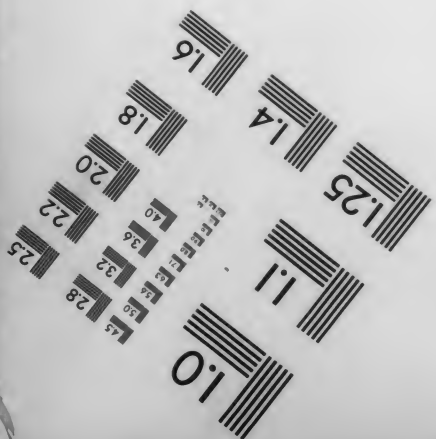
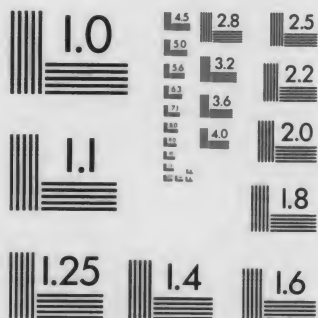
301/587-8202



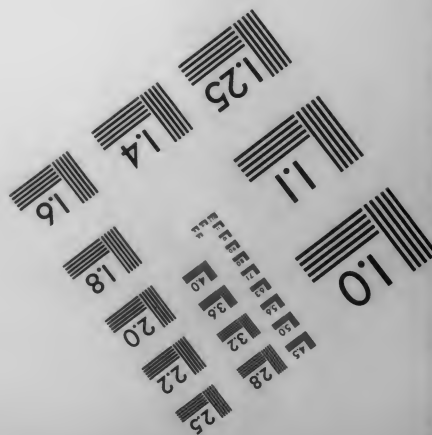
Centimeter



Inches



MANUFACTURED TO AIM STANDARDS
BY APPLIED IMAGE, INC.



100
J
No 11
P.D.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Pragmatism as a Theory of Knowledge

BY

ALBERT RICHARD CHANDLER

AWARDED THE STORY PRIZE

1908

Compliments of
H. A. Horne

THE STORY PRIZE IN PHILOSOPHY.

Through the benefaction of the Hon. Joseph Story of Boston, friend of the College, there is permanently established an annual prize in Philosophy of twenty-five dollars, or such a part of this amount as may be necessary, the same to be used, as the letter of gift says, "for the publication of the best thesis on a subject in philosophy, presented by any member of the Senior Class."

The donor continues: "The fact of such publication, and the preservation of said thesis in a permanent form, it is hoped, may prove an additional stimulus to the members of the class to do honor to themselves and thus to their *Alma Mater*."

Pragmatism as a Theory of Knowledge

Philosophic controversy is very much alive to-day and the storm center of the most lively dispute is pragmatism. If we ask "What is pragmatism?" the pragmatist is likely to reply, "That is not the real question; nothing would be more unpragmatic than the attempt to define pragmatism in a few words; I had rather tell you what sort of a man a pragmatist is and how he deals with philosophical problems, for pragmatism is a temperament and a method, rather than a system of propositions."

Let us then sketch the pragmatic temperament. The pragmatist does not live to think, he thinks to live. As the name suggests, he lays stress on the practical rather than on the theoretical. He emphasizes the concrete rather than the abstract, the particular rather than the general. In his view physics finds its excuse for being, not in the doctrine of the conservation of energy, or the law of gravitation, but in the steam engine and the wireless telegraph. He does not look on life as a set of experiences given him in order that he may form general conceptions of reality, but looks on philosophy as a means by which he may improve his life and mould it into harmony with his ideals.

The pragmatic temperament has not yet expressed itself in a complete system of philosophy, but has busied itself chiefly with the theory of knowledge. It is a fundamental pragmatic doctrine that truth is not static but dynamic, not a relation but a process. "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its *valid-ation*." (James: Pragmatism, p. 201).

What is the nature of the verification process? Pragmatism clears the way with a little psychology. The belief that it is the intellect alone which seeks truth and tests judgments is declared to be false. "Pure thought" is a myth. Every intellectual process is

set in motion and influenced throughout its course by the will and the feelings. They cannot be eliminated even for a moment. Any effort to make one's mind even temporarily "a cold logic-engine" is not only doomed to failure but involves a perversion of one's real nature, a thwarting of one's deepest purposes, the suppression of one's legitimate emotions.

This is the psychological basis of the pragmatic doctrine; now for the superstructure. A belief is said to be true in so far as it satisfies the whole man. A true belief is one which works, which is useful, which helps a man to make his life what he wishes it to be, which helps him to fulfill his purposes and gratify his emotions. An "agreeable leading" is the characteristic of the truth process. "The true is only the expedient in the way of our thinking." "True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process." (James: *Pragmatism*, pp. 202, 222, 204).

The principles of the natural sciences are true, we are told, because they enable us to provide for ourselves food, clothing, and transportation in increasingly effective and satisfactory ways. Aside from their applications they satisfy us by fitting in with and harmoniously rounding out what we know by experience. (This vague talk of harmony is the pragmatist's interpretation of what others call logical cogency). Ideas of art, of morality, of religion are true so far as they fit in with our other ideas, and so far as they are satisfactory to the emotions. In all cases the test of truth is the degree in which it satisfies the man's whole nature, emotional and practical as well as intellectual, though of course emotional satisfactions are more prominent in religious truth than in truth about electric batteries.

There is evidently no absolute rigidity here. A phrase used by F. C. S. Schiller well characterizes the theory; "a declaration of the independence of the concrete whole of man with all his passions and emotions unexpurgated, directed against the cramping rules and regulations by which the Brahmins of academic caste are tempted to impede the free expansion of human life." (*Humanism*, p. xvi). The pragmatist however disclaims laxity. He seeks to harmonize his experience and fulfill his purposes; it is no easy matter to make one's religious beliefs, one's knowledge of natural science, and one's methods of practical activity all live harmoniously together. Pragmatism seeks to be neither rigid nor lax but flexible. (James: *Pragmatism*, pp. 79, 216).

Truth then must work and satisfy. But for whom must it work and whom must it satisfy? F. C. S. Schiller says that "truth indubitably

is to a large extent a social product." (*Humanism*, p. 58). But Prof. James indicates that while some minds need no religion at all, others may find use for his creed of melioristic theism. (*Pragmatism*, p. 301). Is society or the individual the court of last resort? The answer seems to be "Both." Truth, like dress or manners, is evolved by the interaction of individual preferences and the test of time. The orthodoxy and good manners of one age are regarded as heterodox and boorish by the next. Some time in the far distant future we may reach absolute truth, along with perfect costume and ideal manners. (*Pragmatism*, p. 223). Meanwhile each individual must select for himself, giving to the social verdict such weight as he finds it "satisfactory" to give. In Schiller's words: "each sees Life as what he has it in him to perceive, and variously transfigures what, without his vision, were an unseen void. But all are not equally clear sighted, and which sees best, time and trial must establish." (*Humanism*, p. 16). Truth for a particular individual at a particular time consists of those beliefs which then satisfy him. But since he is not perfectly happy he conceives more satisfactory truth to be possible, and is ready to revise this truth as his experience unfolds. Moreover he in company with his fellowmen is helping to evolve truths acceptable to society at large, so that a more and more satisfactory set of truths is attained by society from age to age. Truths then are not merely dynamic but, in part at least, private, transitory, and contradictory. Peace may finally be evolved out of this confusion, but that is a long way ahead, and has little practical bearing on present problems.

We have now before us the kernel of the pragmatic doctrine. Let us first consider its alleged basis in psychology. The pragmatist is correct in asserting that at every moment of our conscious lives we are feeling and willing as well as thinking. But that does not imply that an attempt to exclude prejudice and adopt a cool and dispassionate attitude in intellectual matters is perverse and futile. The mind functions differently while it is seeking truth from what it does when it is seeking pleasure or other aims. We *will* to regard matters in a detached way; the idea that emotion may sway us in deciding questions of fact is emotionally distasteful. We attempt for the time being to disregard our purposes and suppress our emotions. Our will temporarily effaces its own purposes in order that in the end they may be more perfectly fulfilled.

In war it is important to know the enemy's strength and resources. Fear may lead us to overestimate them; conceit may lead us to under-

estimate them. But if the situation is critical, we stop and searchingly consider, "Just what is his strength?" We then strive to discount our own emotions and prejudices and to get at the actual fact. Thus does our will most surely find its fulfillment and our emotions their satisfaction. That is the most practical course. We use a similar method when we set out to examine the nature of the universe as a whole. We desire to live and to live abundantly. How shall we do it? Well, we say to ourselves, what are the conditions under which we must act? Is the universe hostile or friendly? What are our own powers in it? Now we wish that the universe were thus or thus; but, we say to ourselves, if we allow emotional prejudices to obscure our vision, we shall defeat our own ends. If the universe is hostile we want to know it and treat it accordingly; if it is friendly we want to know it and cooperate with it. We want to know the truth whether it hurts or not. We would scorn to live in a Fools' Paradise of self-deception.

This method is not unjust to our emotions and instincts. It takes them into account as *facts*. We say: "What light does the existence of these instincts and emotions throw on our own nature and that of the universe that produced us?" But we strive to avoid counting them twice, first noting them objectively as facts, and then letting them influence us subjectively. Probably we never succeed in overcoming the last trace of prejudice in our thinking. But that is a limitation which we must face as the disadvantage it is, instead of glorying in it.

Let us return to the pragmatic doctrine, and consider whether the account of truth as dynamic is an adequate account. Suppose I think of a number, and ask a friend to guess what it is, but refrain from telling him whether his guess is correct. Have we not a static relation here? There are no consequences, there is no verification on his part. On the pragmatic principle he would have to say that his guess was neither true nor false. But is there not a real relation between his state of mind and mine, which for instance we conceive would be recognized as correspondence or failure to correspond by a mind directly conscious of both our minds? And is not this static relation just what we mean by truth or falsity? Of course it is usually important that we should move on and verify and apply our beliefs. It is the pragmatist's emphasis on application that leads him to ignore the static phase. But when it is a case of one mind knowing the contents of another we plainly have a static phase. This static relation is moreover the very cause for the success of whatever applications and verifications may be made. Suppose that I am angry at a man and he finds it out. Then we have a

static relation: the belief that I am angry in his mind corresponding to the state of anger in my own. But these states of mind do not remain stagnant. They give rise to actions. My anger expresses itself in a plot to ruin his business; his belief in my anger expresses itself in a watchfulness which succeeds in thwarting my plot. The verification and workings which the pragmatists emphasize have now taken place. But it is his belief that I was, on such and such a date, angry, any truer than before? It is, to be sure, better grounded than before. But when we assert its truth we mean its static correspondence to my actual conscious state at that time. And is not the original correspondence the very source of his practical success?

What works in one man's experience may not work in another man's experience nor in his own at another time. Let us take an illustration. My acquaintances have very different ideas of my moral character. Are we to judge the truth of those ideas by the success with which they work in the experience of the individual men who hold them? A very low opinion of my moral worth probably works very nicely in my enemy's experience, while an idealized version of my character works just as smoothly for my friend. But are these opinions true? Shall we not rather say that these various opinions approach truth in proportion as they approach conformity to my actual character? It not that just what we *intend* whenever we make an assertion? Of course the fragmentary character of our experience, the fallibility of our logic, and the presence of our prejudices often prevent our reaching this conformity. But when we make an assertion we *intend* it to conform to the facts, not merely to be expedient in our own experience. My experience is what it is; the truth about it does not depend on the prejudices or temporary expediences of those who form opinions about it. So also I am convinced that the experience of others is a fact that does not admit of countless equally valid descriptions, but that there is *one* truth about it which I more or less successfully approximate. To give up this conviction is to lapse into solipsism, for if my friend's mind exists at all it exists as one series of experiences, not as countless alternative series. This brings us to another important point.

The dynamic view of truth cannot be accepted because it really implies solipsism. Truth is alleged to consist of verification processes; concepts and propositions are merely tools of thought. According to the pragmatic definition the truth of the statement: "Your mind exists", consists solely of the verification process which takes place in my own consciousness; it is only a convenient tool of my thought for manipulating

my own experience. In other words my own experience is the sole reality. Of course the pragmatist does not hold this position; he breaks the bounds of his theory of knowledge and assumes the reality of all human experience. This is the basis on which he works out the details of his theory of knowledge, including the social evolution of truth; experience just as it comes to men is the primary reality; all other concepts such as energy, things, causation, are merely tools of thought by which we mould our experience. But when he comes to metaphysics the pragmatist tells us of a non-human reality, a crude, plastic world-stuff upon which man "engenders" truth and which he moulds through his cognitive and practical activity. When it comes to religion he says that, if it works, we may accept a belief in God and immortality. (Pragmatism, p. 300). Is the plastic world-stuff merely a tool of thought? If so how can we engender truth upon it? Or is it just as real as we are? And God and immortality—are they also mere tools of thought? Or if the world-stuff is real, have we engendered God and immortality upon it? Or are they just as real as we are? I confess I do not quite grasp the pragmatist's position on these points. But it seems plain to me that he cannot get any ontology or theology at all without again breaking the bounds of his theory of knowledge.

As a matter of fact the old conception of truth as conformity to fact has crept into the pragmatist's philosophy, and the pragmatist is using his new theory merely as a criterion by which to seek the good old-fashioned kind of truth. Our consideration of the pragmatist's psychology has already indicated that cool reason, not the satisfaction of the whole mind as it is at any given moment, is the only practical way of seeking the old-fashioned variety of truth. For our purposes and emotions defeat their own ends when they interfere in the process of determining what the truth is.

Let us summarize. The pragmatist defines truth as a dynamic process. He declares that will and feeling are essential elements in the process; that it is a process of satisfying the whole man; that truth is flexible; that it is individual for the individual and social for society. But the will and feelings *do* strive to efface themselves in the search for truth; the dynamic view of truth misrepresents our real intention in making assertions; the pragmatic theory of truth implies solipsism, but the pragmatist breaks the bounds of his theory three successive times: first by asserting the existence of the whole human race, second by asserting the existence of a plastic reality about us, and third by offering a theology; finally he uses the new theory as a method

of seeking the old-fashioned variety of truth, but it is not a practical method.

So much for the theoretical aspects of pragmatism; what are its practical aspects? In the first place it would be practically inexpedient for pragmatism to become a popular philosophy. The full swing which it gives to the feelings and its assertion that reality is plastic tend to encourage loose thinking. But the practical need of the people at large is not looser thinking but more rigid thinking. On the other hand it is performing real services to philosophy. It is fighting verbalism and abstraction. It insists that words must have meanings capable of interpretation, and that an abstraction must not be handled as if it were concrete. But its great service is in emphasizing application. Other philosophers have made rational derivation from experience the test of the truth of general principles; pragmatists have made success in application the test. I believe that rational derivation from experience is the test of truth but I also believe that no philosophical principle has fulfilled its destiny until all possible applications of it have been made; further, that working out the applications of a theory helps the thinker to get his bearings; and that if a theory fails ignominiously in application it is wise to re-examine the reasoning by which it was reached.

Pragmatism is an invasion of theoretical realms by the practical spirit. Let us hope that the philosophers will work out the applications of their systems, turn the pragmatists' flank, and invade the realm of practicality with proofs that their theories are after all more practical than pragmatism itself, and none the less human because they transcend the limits of humanism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Works Expounding Pragmatism

- William James: *The Will to Believe* (Preface and first essay)
New York 1898
- William James: *Pragmatism*
New York 1907
- John Dewey: *Studies in Logical Theory*
Chicago 1903
- F. C. S. Schiller: *Humanism*
London and New York 1903
- Giovanni Papini: *What Pragmatism is Like*
Popular Science Monthly, vol. LXXI p. 351, Oct. 1907
- ##### Criticisms of Pragmatism
- Philosophical Review*, vol. XVII no. 2 pp. 113, 180, 1908
- Josiah Royce: *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, (Lectures on Loyalty, Truth and Reality, and on Loyalty and Religion)
New York 1908
- W. M. Salter: *Pragmatism: a New Philosophy*
Atlantic Monthly, vol. 101, p. 657, May, 1908
- For further bibliography consult James: *Pragmatism*, preface, and M. W. Calkins:
The Persistent Problems of Philosophy, pp 557-559
New York 1907

